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Noam Chomsky: tackling the Scottish problem ... the assistance of Jim Sillars will not be required.



By LORN MACINTYRE

THE AMERICAN philosopher, Noam Chomsky, is taking part in a two-day event in Glasgow in January which could have a profound influence on Scotland's future, and which will set an intellectual theme for the city's year of culture. But the programme is ignoring Scottish politicians.

The discussions, on self-determination and power, are being arranged by the Free University of Glasgow in conjunction with the magazine Scottish Child. Peter Kravitz, editor of the influential Edinburgh Review and one of the founder members of the Free University of Glasgow, which now has about 250 members, described the loose organisation as arising in part out of disenchantment with the traditional Scottish university system and with Scottish politics.

"The free university's aim has been to bring together people of different ages and different classes who are completely outside orthodox educational establishments, but who still want to continue to debate and discuss issues outwith a small-minded Labour or SNP party caucus."

It is hoped that George Davie, Scotland's greatest living philosopher, will be able to attend the event. In a recent interview for Education Herald he complained that the Scottish education system "has been completely fractured because it no longer has

universities; it's a provincial system attached to the main British university system".

The Glasgow writer, James Kelman, a contender in this year's Booker Prize for his novel A Disaffection, about a Scottish school teacher, will take part. The event has arisen in part out of an essay Kelman has written on Chomsky, using some of Dr Davie's arguments. The combination of Kelman's talents as novelist and philosopher — unique in modern Scotland — has earned him the praise of Dr Davie.

Chomsky, professor of modern languages and linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a philosopher, linguist, and political activist. Getting him to come to Glasgow is a coup for the organisers, since his diary is booked up two years ahead because of the worldwide demand to hear one of the masters of modern thought.

The event is being held on January 10 and 11 in Govan, the constituency of SNP MP Jim Sillars. But Mr Kravitz said that there will be no role for Mr Sillars or other Scottish politicians.

"I don't think most of the people coming to this event are interested in Jim Sillars because they are generalists who are suspicious of specialists. Sillars and others like him are specialist politicians and they deserve to be challenged at every point by peo-

ple outside the orthodox political scene."

Mr Kravitz criticised "the complacency of Labour, and the SNP's problems in keeping its reactionaries happy whilst also pretending to be radical".

Dr Davie's internationally admired writings on Scottish education and their relevance to the present will be one of the themes of the event. Derek Rodger, editor of Scottish Child magazine, said: "Education has been asked to carry the complex-

THE Herald Diary has four free £75 tickets to dispense for the 1990 Glasgow concert by Luciano Pavarotti. They have been donated by an anonymous, philanthropic, opera-loving but SECC-phobic reader who has ordained that the tickets go to four deserving pensioners. More details appear in the Diary on Page 16.

ities and anxieties of the wider society. We've got a number of teachers who've registered to attend. The attraction for these people is that by getting in touch with those outside the so-called education industry, teachers and other educationists stand to gain a tremendous amount of support."

The event will bring to the attention of the wide Scottish public the importance of the achievements of the psychiatrist,

W.R. Fairbairn (1889-1964), the father of Sir Nicholas Fairbairn.

The event will also promote the work of John D. Sutherland, the distinguished psychoanalyst and former medical director of the Tavistock Clinic, London, who, along with colleagues in the caring professions, set up the Scottish Institute of Human Relations in Edinburgh.

Members of the free university, a people's movement whose format is now being replicated in other parts of Britain as an alternative to the conventional educational system, are convinced that Scotland will have to discover its political destiny on a basis of individual self-scrutiny and not party slogans.

"You cannot free yourself from colonial rule unless you also make attempts to free yourself from internal colonial rules, from a highly disciplinarian, rigid, ethical conservatism," Mr Kravitz argued. That is why the writings of Fairbairn, Sutherland, and the late R.D. Laing are considered of major importance.

There are only 300 places for the two-day event, which is being held at the Pearce Institute, Govan. The cost will be £10 a day, and £6 concessionary. Many of the places have already been taken, and there is expected to be huge interest because of the calibre of the participants, including the Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean as well as African writers.

Meeting of minds to point Scottish direction

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Pupils as pawns

January 17.

Sir,— In the erudite waffling of the expatriate Frank McNairn (January 17) do I detect a hint of anti-feminism?

His real message must be that children (pupils?) are only artefacts to be used as pawns in the furtherance of teacher career development.

*Andrew Kennedy,
113 Shakespeare Avenue,
Clydebank.*

Unfair criticism

January 22.

Sir,— About James D. Young's attack on the Self Determination and Power Event held recently in Govan, there is almost nothing to say. Like so many academics and career-orientated "specialists" of the mainstream "left" as well as "right", he seems intuitively hostile to anything over which he has neither control nor authority.

His politics resemble not so much an iron curtain as a brick wall, while his ideas on art and culture betray a predictably fatuous philistinism. Yet issue must be taken on his outrageous assault on George Davie.

Davie's work requires no defence against him, it simply requires reading and understanding. Dr Young seems to have read something but either has no understanding of the matter at general issue, or very little; this renders his assault all the more appalling.

In itself ignorance of a subject is never a fault, but as so often happens when such ignorance is found in one of society's salaried "experts", out of it comes embittered arrogance rather than silence.

*James Kelman,
Secker & Warburg Ltd,
81 Fulham Road,
London.*

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...conomics, and RE a.
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The policy of making compuls questions in Higher English examinations on Shakespeare and Chaucer have lapsed but there is an opportunity to introduce a compulsory Scottish question from the board.

Parents now have power. If they feel strongly about their Scottish heritage and wish their children to be taught about their native language they can make their feelings known to their school boards and in that way effect change. That is what Burns would have wished.

At present I feel more interest is shown by the Russians in our literature than by ourselves.

*A. King,
6 Glen Clunie,
East Kilbride.*

Five more verses

January 15.

Sir,— In answer to Mr Russell's plea (January 15) to settle the argument on the proper version of the chorus of Auld Lang Syne let me quote from A Book of Scotland, an anthology of poetry and song by G. F. Mainie:

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

And for good measure, the last verse:
And here's a hand, my trusty fiere
And gie's hand o' thine,
And we'll tak a right gude-willi
waught,

For auld lang syne.

It becomes boring to hear the san chorus repeated so often by th uneducated public. Let's encourage th learning of the five other verses in o schools. There's too much sloppiness i our Scots literary culture in this our Ye of Culture, for Glasgow at least. I'm su a literary man, like Lorn Macintyre, former teacher, just made a slip with "the sake of auld lang syne".

*Robert Watson,
96 Cartvale Road,
Glasgow.*

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Human nature and men of the left

January 22.

Sir,— Petty, parochial, intolerant, spiteful, envious and cruel? James D. Young's lead feature in last week's Education Herald certainly got top marks for sowing confusion!

To have read his account of the recent Self-Determination and Power event addressed by the American philosopher and critic Noam Chomsky you would — if you had persevered with his dense and convoluted piece — have got the impression that instead of being initiated and organised by a small independent magazine, and the equally tenuous Free University, the whole thing had been put together by the silver-spooned bigots of the Freedom Association.

Dr Young wrongly quotes me in my introductory remarks as cooing in the shadow of the great. I spoke, he says, of "the prestige of being in such exalted company." This is a serious charge indeed. Only one peg down from calling me a middle-class intellectual!

Now, I will concede that ironic humour is a problem for those of us on the left, and we do tend to listen to what we want to hear, but such a charge was unwarranted.

Dr Young retreated to the safety of Brechin's Bar where he tells us he had his "best discussions" with members of the Leningrad Writers' Group. Doesn't he see what happened to him?

Brechin's Bar was, by arrangement, an annex to the main event and the doctor was taking part in a learning experience without knowing it. It seemed to feel good. I bet up at Stirling University, where he works, they're still having boring old lectures.

He had such a whoopee, by the sound of it, that he didn't understand a jot of what Dr George Davie said the next day. But George was talking about human nature, and that's where the men of the left, at the junction of the personal and the political, have such problems.

Petty, parochial, intolerant, spiteful, envious and cruel? Not my words, but James D. Young's own, in the very first sentence of his autobiography describing his Grangemouth milieu of the 1930s. It just goes to show: this education thing takes years.

Derek Rodger,
Editor,
Scottish Child,
4 Garrioch Drive,
Glasgow.